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An
Oration
pronounced before the
The Beta Kappa Society
of
Harvard University
July 17, 1851
By William B. Sprague.
Albany
1851

Gift

AN

ORATION

PRONOUNCED BEFORE THE

PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY

OF

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

JULY 17, 1851.

By WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

ALBANY :
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1851.

Archives# 45550-16
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P23
1851

March 11, 1975

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*Wickham an Esq,
With the wife's kindest regards.*

TO THE

HONOURABLE ROBERT C. WINTHROP,

PRESIDENT OF THE PHI BETA KAPPA SOCIETY,

This Oration

IS INSCRIBED,

IN TESTIMONY OF HIGH RESPECT FOR

HIS PRIVATE VIRTUES,

HIS ENLIGHTENED PATRIOTISM

AND

HIS WELL EARNED HONOURS.

ORATION.

It would be difficult, I believe, to find a subject distinctively American, that might not receive some aid in its illustration, from the hallowed associations belonging to the spot on which we are assembled. If I were to speak of American genius, the proudest examples would throng upon me from your own College catalogue. If I were to speak of American literature, I should feel that I was standing beside the cradle in which she was rocked, and breathing the pure air that has sustained and invigorated her. If I were to speak of American institutions, I could not forget that there are grave-yards on every side of me, in which their illustrious framers and defenders sleep. If I were to speak particularly of American liberty, I should recognize in the very names of your towns, the symbols of

her early struggles and bloody baptism. But the topic on which I design to speak, is more general than any of these, and may be said, in some sense, to include them all—it is the AMERICAN MIND—her *character* and *destiny*. It opens, I know, into an almost boundless field; but you need not be startled at the prospect; for I mean to range about, here and there, till the hour is over, and then leave you,—if not to the good will of the muses, as I had expected, at least to your accustomed interchange of bright thoughts and kindly feelings,—however little I may have said either to gratify or to profit. Meanwhile, I am sure that we all feel it as a burden upon our spirits, that my honoured friend, who was to have shared with me these exercises, instead of being here to delight us by the creations of genius, has had occasion to seek that deep retirement which is so congenial to the stricken heart.* May Heaven impart to him the spirit of a quiet and trusting mourner, and quicken us to heed

* Mr. J. T. Fields was prevented, by a severe domestic bereavement, from delivering the poem, which he had prepared for the occasion. While the exercises were in progress, however, the Rev. John Pierpont unexpectedly appeared, and was cordially welcomed, as his substitute.

the voice that mingles its notes of warning even with our mutual rejoicings and literary festivities.

It would not be strange if some of you should infer from the announcement of my subject, that I am meditating a fresh offering to our national self-respect,—a service with which possibly an uncharitable world might connect the idea of supererogation. I confess that I have no nervous sensitiveness at hearing our country decently praised; and if I could be betrayed into such a foible any where, doubtless it would be at the acknowledged centre of her greatness. I intend, however, to speak soberly, as unto wise men; and if I should succeed in making any of you more thankful for the privilege of being American citizens, or more watchful against the perils that encircle our birthright, or more active in advancing the nation's prosperity, the utmost that I propose to myself will have been accomplished.

There are certain circumstances from which we might form a probable judgment of the mind of an individual, anterior to any knowledge of

its actual development—I refer particularly to birth and education. If you were about to choose a friend or a counsellor, a ruler or even a servant, you would not deem it unsuitable, especially in the absence of more direct evidence, to inquire what blood was flowing in his veins, and what influences had moulded his character. The same rule of judgment is applicable to the mind of a nation. If you will form a conclusion at once intelligent and comprehensive, in respect to its tendencies, its capabilities, its prospects, you must begin to study it in the very first page of its history; nay, you must go back to the period when it was bound up in the character of some other nation, and mark the process by which it assumed a distinct existence. And then you must trace the diversified influences which have operated in its formation, viewing them, so far as may be, in both their separate and combined action. I admit that your judgment must depend ultimately on your observation of the actual result, rather than on a philosophic analysis of the influences by which it has been obtained; still, you cannot suitably appreciate

the former, without considering it in its relation to the latter. You cannot know all that is to be known of the mind of a nation, unless you go forth into the mighty past, pausing at the different stages of its progress, and observing the lessons which it has received, the discipline by which it has been exercised, in the school of a wise and wonder-working Providence.

In looking for the *origin* of the American mind, I need go no farther back than to the settlement of the Anglo Saxons in Britain; for though this people had previously had a distinct existence, having been gradually formed amidst the Germanic vicissitudes and conflicts, yet that event marked the grand epoch in their history, and was chiefly instrumental in developing their character. It must be acknowledged indeed that their introduction into Britain, though apparently originating in the spirit of accommodation, was really prompted by the lust of power. The Britons, about the middle of the fifth century, being not a little disturbed by the hostile visits of the Picts and the Scots who dwelt upon their borders, and being too feeble, in the ab-

sence of the Roman legions, to encounter them successfully, solicited the aid of this tribe of the Northmen,—a people that had never bowed to the sceptre even of the mistress of the world. The Saxons promptly rendered the desired assistance, and obtained a complete victory over the invaders; but instead of leaving the Britons to enjoy the benefit of the victory, they turned invaders themselves, and finally gained possession of the whole country. The result in respect to the Britons was, that many of them were slaughtered, some fled to Gaul, and a large portion to Wales, while comparatively few remained, the victims of oppression, upon their native soil. The result in regard to the Saxons was, that, from being brought in contact with so much of the humanizing influence of the Romans as had survived the conquest of the country, and especially from being favoured with the evangelical labours of the missionary Augustin, they gradually emerged from their Pagan and barbarous state. It is not strange that they were constantly engaged in wars, either among themselves or with their neighbours, the Danes;

for the spirit of the age was warlike, and was fitted to bring out the sterner rather than the milder qualities. Still, there was considerable progress in civilization; and the reign of Alfred particularly, you know, was signalized for a liberal patronage of learning, as his character was distinguished for the union of learning and virtue.

The subjection of the English to the Normans in the eleventh century marks another period in the history of our national pedigree. In the commencement of his reign, William gave some tokens of conciliation towards the people he had conquered; but his ambitious and tyrannical spirit would not allow him to be at the head of a government which was not essentially and highly despotic. He quickly established the feudal constitution, dividing most of the lands into baronies, which he distributed as might best subserve his interests; and, at the same time, with the concurrence of the Pope, expelled all the English dignitaries, and gave their places to his own people. He also projected the abolition of the Saxon language,—actually making the

French the language of the court, and exerting himself in various ways to make it the language of the country. But notwithstanding all his attempts, successful and unsuccessful, at revolution and oppression, the Saxons not only remained in the land, but constituted the larger part of its population. Their language, though essentially modified by a liberal infusion of foreign words and idioms, still continued to be the popular language. Their institutions, though moulded into a new form by the influence of feudalism, were still pervaded more or less by the Saxon spirit. The two nations were perhaps equally bold and warlike; but the Saxons were the more thoughtful, the Normans the more impulsive; the spirit of chivalry had much to do in moulding the character of the latter, whereas we detect no traces of it in the character of the former. For a while, it was no easy matter for them to dwell together as brethren; but time gradually subdued their mutual antipathies, and fused them into a common mass, so that the peculiarities of each could no longer be distinguished. And, from this period, we see the nation always bear-

ing the same character ;—a character, modified indeed by the circumstances of different ages, but so strongly marked as not to admit of being confounded with that of any other people. While the great subject of liberty was contemplated by them only amidst deep shadows, we may detect the workings of a freedom loving spirit, sometimes in the deliberate utterances of the nation, and sometimes in the tumultuous sallies of the populace. I do not remember a more striking example of the latter, than the famous Wat Tyler rebellion, in the reign of Richard the Second. The levying of a poll tax of a shilling a head on all persons above the age of fifteen produced among the lower classes a degree of discontent, which it took but a slight incident to mature into a vigorous resistance. One of the tax gatherers having grossly insulted the daughter of a tiler at Deptford, by the name of Wat, the father instantly despatched him, by striking him on the head with a hammer ; the consequence of which was, that, within a short time, not less than sixty thousand men were collected near London, not merely to testify their

displeasure at the arbitrary tax, but to attempt the deliverance of a large portion of the people from personal servitude. While they encamped about Blackheath and Greenwich, a priest of Kent, by the name of John Ball, whom the rebels had let out of Maidstone goal, encouraged them to go forward, by delivering long and exciting homilies on the text—

When Adam delved and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman ?—

a text, by the way, which I should hardly venture to repeat in the hearing of certain agrarian circles of my own state, lest some among them should shrewdly seize upon it, as a veritable proof from sacred writ of the modern doctrine of anti-rentism.

But it would be impossible even to approach any adequate estimate of the mind of our ancestry, without glancing at its developments in connection with various stages of the great contest for religious truth and liberty. The first perceptible throb of the spirit of reformation was in the bosom of Wickliffe. His mission, however, seems to have been chiefly that of a herald. He

rose as a morning star, and, having given some high tokens of the future, disappeared. But the work that he may be said to have begun moved silently forward in the hands of his followers, persecuted and despised though they were, during the next century. Then came Henry the Eighth,—as contradictory a piece of humanity as the world ever saw; a Catholic from prejudice and a Protestant out of spite; a stout rebel against the authority of Rome, but a submissive receiver and vigorous defender of her dogmas; the Head of a Reformed nation, and yet the persecutor of Reformers within its bosom. His reign, however, as identified with the first establishment of Protestantism, was truly and gloriously significant; and the act by which this was accomplished, however it may have originated in pride, or revenge, or sensuality, was yet to be regarded as a sort of providential response to the inward heavings of the nation for truth and right. The old order of things came back indeed in a subsequent reign; but it lasted only long enough to prove that the spirit of reformation was an overmatch for the spirit of

persecution; and it seemed fitting that so malignant a star should, by way of warning to all coming generations, set in blood. The efforts subsequently made in the same direction by James the Second, only showed that he lived a few centuries too late; that, however he might continue to cherish Romanism in his heart, the nation would no longer tolerate it on the throne.

We are descended then from a nation that worked its way out of Barbarism into Civilization, out of Paganism into Christianity, out of Romanism into Protestantism; but we must advance yet another step, before we reach the culminating point of our ancestral glory. No great enterprize is ever begun and completed the same day—God himself took six days to make the world. The Reformation, as established in the reign of Elizabeth, though a noble advance upon the state of things in preceding ages, was yet, in the view of no inconsiderable part of the nation, an unfinished work. It left many consciences struggling under grievous burdens. It interfered with man's rights in regard to the most sacred part of his duty,—the worship of his Maker. It not only

made doubtful matters imperative, but it regarded disobedience in such matters as a crime punishable with exile or death. The men who could not brook these restraints were Puritans,—a noble name, though it should be conceded that their enemies originated it. The struggle was not mainly for this or that religious system, but for the right of framing their own religious system;—in other words, for the great principle of religious liberty; the matter of Episcopacy on the one hand, or of Independency, or Presbyterianism, or any other form of doctrine or polity on the other, being a mere circumstance. These men were no enthusiasts,—no tithers of mint, anise and cummin. They were not disposed to set up arrogant claims. They were not dazzled by the prospective glory of a martyr's crown. But they were thoughtful and firm, honest and earnest; and because their hearts were full of faith in God and of confidence in the rectitude of their cause, they could hear without dismay the terrible decisions of the Star Chamber, and could walk without faltering to the spot where they were to die. From this portion of the British

mind the American mind was an offshoot. Some of these noble spirits, hopeless of accomplishing any further good in their own country, sought a temporary asylum among their neighbours, the Hollanders; but it was not long before their plan of immigration to this country was matured, and they were actually in the posture of embarking, with the Heavens bowed to bless them, as John Robinson's last prayer went up.

The few familiar facts at which I have hinted, may suffice as an illustration of our national descent. You perceive that it was not in the English merely, but in the Puritan, mind that the seminal principle of the American mind was lodged. The Puritans were not indeed the first to make a settlement on these shores—the English who adhered to the national hierarchy were here before them; and so were the Dutch; but *they* came merely in the spirit of commercial adventure; whereas the Puritans came from reverence for the dictates of conscience,—in obedience to what they regarded a mandate from Heaven. Far be it from me, however, to derogate from the honour due to any other of the

early settlers. I would allow to the English who peopled the Old Dominion, and afterwards spread through the Southern country, the high chivalrous qualities which undoubtedly belonged to them, and which have never ceased to appear in their posterity. I would allow to the Dutch, among whose worthy descendants my lot is cast, their full measure of intelligence, sobriety and integrity. I would allow to the Huguenots, who came at a later period, all the vivacity, fervour and energy, that have so justly been claimed for them. I would give full credit to the illustrious Founder of Pennsylvania, who came at a later period still, for all that comprehensiveness of mind and strength of purpose, that calm dignity, and pure philanthropy, and exalted wisdom, that shone so brightly in his character, and impressed so indelibly his institutions. Nor would I withhold due praise from the Roman Catholic colony by which Maryland was settled—to their honour let it be told, not only that they adopted the most liberal policy in respect to property, but,—however it be accounted for,—set an example of religious toleration, which really shamed the purest

Protestantism of the time. Still, I must be permitted to express the belief,—however some who hear me may smile at it as a pleasant New England hallucination—an act of idolatrous homage to the *genius loci*,—that the Puritan mind is the predominant mind of the country; that that which was borne to these shores in the May Flower, has diffused itself as a sort of universal presence, modified indeed by the elements which it has absorbed, as well as by natural progress, but still retaining in the freshness of youth every distinctive characteristic.

I assume then that the American mind was here, from the hour that the feet of the Pilgrims first rested on Plymouth rock. As she was noble in her extraction, so there was maturity and greatness in her earliest thoughts and aspirations. She was indeed conscious of high purposes, and doubtless of high powers also; but it was yet a secret in the bosom of Omniscience that there was treasured up in her wisdom enough, virtue enough, energy enough, to fix one of the brightest landmarks in the history of the race. Let me ask you now to contemplate,

for a moment, the *training* which she has had, the *schools* in which she has been taught, during the two hundred and thirty years of our national existence.

First of all, she was ushered into the school of *conflict* and *self-denial*. Nature herself gave to the Pilgrim band at best a cold reception. She met them in her winter robes. She spoke to them in the deep sighing of the winds, and the howl of the midnight storm. She seemed to say, Leave these bleak and rugged shores, at least for the present, to the occupancy of savage men; and if you *must* come back, pray that your flight hither be not in the winter. But there was a spirit within them that mocked at all the suggestions of fear, gathering strength, as the prospect gathered darkness. In projecting their enterprise, they had wisely adjusted their purpose of endurance to the probable measure of hardship and sacrifice which it would involve; and hence, when their future lot was first visibly shadowed forth to them in the rock-bound coast and the frowning, unbroken wilderness that lay beyond, they eagerly ran forward to embrace it,

as part of the high destiny which they had set themselves to accomplish. I might speak of all the common privations incident to adventure, and yet leave nearly the whole story of their struggles and sufferings untold. Their number was small at best; but within a brief period one-half were living among the graves of the other half. Both the ferocity and the cunning of the children of the forest threatened their extinction; and this bitter hostility, instead of spending itself upon the first generation, descended in all its virulence upon the next. It was not long before it became manifest that the Atlantic was not so broad but that Tyranny could reach across it; and now a fresh cup of gall was administered to them, which it took nearly an entire century to exhaust. After their rights had been the sport of arbitrary power till the spirit of allegiance was extinguished,—after the most respectful and earnest petitions for redress had been scornfully rejected,—the fulness of time having now come,—endurance gave way to resistance; the floods of unavenged wrong lifted up their voice; and for seven years

the nation was clad in armour and bathed in blood. Here was the American mind unfolding her powers in the rough school of adversity; thrown on her own resources in a conflict with the most powerful nation upon earth. I speak not now of the victory which she achieved—I only say that in the prosecution of the contest, as well as in the long train of oppressive measures by which it had been preceded, she was subjected not only to vigorous exercise, but to severe discipline.

But I am anticipating another of the great schools in which the mind of our country has been trained—I mean the school of *freedom*; for it was in the cause of freedom that a large part of the suffering of which I have spoken was endured. Our fathers took lessons upon liberty in one way, and their posterity take them in another. They contemplated it as a boon that Heaven was yet to bestow. They took counsel of their own inward sense of right. They carefully marked the point beyond which submission was no virtue and rebellion no crime. They gathered strength from a principle of sympathy

and coöperation. The threats that came across the ocean fell upon them as an inspiring influence. They looked calmly at the chain that had been forged for them, and the more they looked, the more they were resolved that they would sooner die than wear it. And never were their impulses for independence so strong, as when they were proclaiming their independence at the point of the bayonet. Had they been of a tame or timid habit, the circumstances in which they were placed would have been enough to blight any budding hope of freedom; but these circumstances acting upon minds of Puritan descent,—minds in which endurance was a matter of calm and conscientious calculation, rather than of servile compliance, formed a powerful ministration in aid of the cause of liberty—they were like sunbeams to quicken the germination of precious seed, or to bring out the glory of spring. But how changed the case of their descendants! They too have been trained in the school of freedom; but it is freedom in possession, not merely in purpose or in prospect; it is freedom established on a firm

foundation, not hanging on the doubtful issue of a battle; it is freedom going forth in her glory, and lifting high her golden standard, not moving in anxious silence, as if her only safety were in surrounding herself with high walls, and keeping a sentinel on every watch-tower. Yes, up to this hour at least, I may safely say, the American mind has always been, in one sense or another, in the school of liberty. She was there when the Pilgrims knelt in the wilderness to thank God that they could worship Him in their own way. She was there when our fathers of a subsequent generation entered into a league to defy where they had been used to supplicate. And she has been there in these later years, walking in the light of established institutions, and originating influences in her turn, by which those institutions are growing in dignity, strength and usefulness.

Let me add that the American mind has been trained in the school of *intelligence* and *virtue*. There was much intellectual and moral nobility in the little band that came first—nothing less could have projected so magnificent a fabric, or

laid for it so deep and strong a foundation. Within a few years, the very brightest lights of old England were scattered about in this wilderness—the fruits of Oxford and Cambridge began to be found here in clusters. And among other great and good spirits there came one who conceived and executed a noble project of munificence; who, though he quickly rested from his labours, lived long enough to make it certain that his name will live forever. If I were to stand beneath a venerable oak which had refreshed by its shade the men of several generations, and could know that some hand now no longer to be distinguished, had, from a benevolent regard to posterity, deposited in the earth the acorn from which it sprang, I could not forbear a sentiment of reverence and gratitude towards that unknown hand, though it had done nothing more than minister to the comfort of this poor outward nature. But here we all are reposing under a tree of knowledge planted by John Harvard more than two centuries ago, that has long since not only overshadowed the land with its branches, but filled it with its pleasant

fruit. It were needless to leave a caution to posterity to see that due honour be awarded to his name ; for his name shines with an inherent lustre ; and whatever other stars may be lost from our intellectual firmament, *that* will never be quenched, till the stars in the literal heavens shall fall. But say whether it was not an anomaly in human experience, that, within twenty years from the time of the first landing, and when the wilderness had yet only begun to retire, there should be reproduced on this ground most of the essential advantages for intellectual culture, that the renowned universities of Britain could boast. Nor was this all ; for provision was incorporated with the civil constitution for securing the means of education to every family and every individual ; so that the ignorant, as truly as the wicked, were without excuse. After about sixty years, another similar institution was established in a neighbouring colony ; and then came another and another ; and the process of multiplication has been going on, until the whole land has become studded with colleges. And there has been a corresponding increase of

the humbler means of improvement; "the school-master abroad" has passed into a proverb; and the domain of a district teacher has always been looked upon as a field of honourable influence. Each successive generation has turned out its share of books connected with almost every branch of human knowledge; and then the stores of British learning have been scarcely less accessible than our native productions. It must be acknowledged that, in later years, the advantages for education have hardly kept pace with our unparalleled increase of population; nevertheless, we may safely say that our country, including the whole period of its existence, has been singularly blessed in respect to its instrumentalities for the general diffusion of knowledge. And to knowledge I may add virtue; for it was the love of truth and liberty, in which all virtue is founded, that brought our ancestors hither. We do not claim that they were perfect men; but we do claim that, as a community, they reached a high standard of moral excellence; that they left behind them not only a good example, but good instructions

and good institutions, by means of which their influence has worked its way down through all the generations that have succeeded them. Am I not justified then in saying that the American mind has been, from the beginning, preëminently privileged in respect to both intellectual and moral training.

I ought perhaps to apologize for having detained you so long with facts that lie so much on the surface of our history; but you will readily perceive that they form the only elements of an adequate illustration of the first part of my subject,—namely, the descent and the training of the American mind, as indicating her probable character at this day. Let us now, keeping our eye on the past, inquire what sort of a character the mind of this nation might be expected to assume; and notice, as we pass along, whether the result of our inquiry does not harmonize exactly with the result of our observation.

I ask then, is there not every thing in our history to awaken the expectation that she would be an *independent* mind? What say you of the Anglo Saxon blood,—of the Norman blood,—of

the Puritan blood,—aye, and I will say, even of the Roman blood; for if any of this lingers in American veins, it is the blood of old Rome, and not of modern Rome,—the blood of the healthy giant, and not of the sickly dwarf. What say you again of the fact that the American people were, for a century and a half, passing from one scene of conflict to another, and yet were never known to yield; that, having fought their way to freedom, they framed these republican institutions with scarcely any other than an ideal model? What should you look for in that mind which took her earlier lessons of self denial amidst the privations and perils of the wilderness, and her later ones amidst the fire and blood of Lexington and Bunker Hill?

I may say that what you would expect is precisely what you behold,—a spirit of vigorous independence. We talk of self-made men—we are emphatically a self-made nation. We feel that, under God, the springs of our existence and prosperity are in ourselves. We do not mean to provoke aggression; but if it comes unprovoked, we expect to meet it victoriously.

And why should we not—for we are a host now; and when we were one, we chased a thousand, and when we were two, we put ten thousand to flight. And it is not merely in the nation at large, but in individuals,—not merely in regard to matters of public moment, but in respect to every thing, that you witness the operation of an independent spirit. Whatever other rights our countrymen may surrender, they will never yield that of thinking and acting for themselves; and sometimes, it must be acknowledged that, in the horror which they feel for every thing like prescription, they embrace some revolting extravagance or absurdity. It would not be difficult to find cases in which individuals have gloried in the free exercise of their powers, while they have actually been in bondage to some evil genius that has danced, like an *ignis fatuus*, over the *terra incognita* of philosophy, or, what is still worse, over the wild marshes of fanaticism.

Would you not expect the American mind to be an *enlightened* mind? Did Alfred, the great patron of learning among the Anglo Saxons, live in vain, even for so remote a posterity? Has

there no advantage come down to us from his having founded the University of Oxford? Is it nothing that the noble language in which he wrote is the basis of our own? Were the high intellectual attainments of our Puritan fathers of no moment to us? Has the system of education which they instituted nearly two centuries and a half ago, and which has been improved and enlarged by the wisdom and energy of succeeding periods, yet fallen powerless upon the mind of the present generation?

I am, by no means disposed unduly to magnify our country's intellectual importance, nor to claim for her the honour of taking the lead in most of the great branches of human knowledge—of course her comparative youth would stamp with vanity any such pretension. But I will venture to say that the American mind in the middle of the nineteenth century compares well, in point of general culture, with the mind of any other nation; and if Scotland and Prussia be excepted, has greatly the advantage of any other. We have indeed scholars of no mean stature; we have authors whose works are

eagerly sought and carefully treasured by the most learned men in Europe; and there are names among us, especially in the walks of discovery, of which the world has already decreed that we shall not have the exclusive property. But it is the diffusion, rather than the concentration, of knowledge, that constitutes our distinction. We glory not merely in the fact that Learning, instead of being immured in cloisters, as she once was, is walking abroad in her robes; but in the additional fact that, instead of dwelling in high places and shedding her grace and lustre upon a few, as she does in some countries at the present day, she has taken familiarly to the masses, and has condescended to make her abode even in the cabins of poverty. And as virtue and knowledge have been united in the character of our ancestry, so we may reasonably claim that this goodly alliance has never yet been dissolved. Yes, whatever admissions truth may require in respect to our national degeneracy, we may say fearlessly that the American mind, as represented by the present generation, has not only been baptized in the name of Pro-

testant Christianity, but is pervaded by at least some degree of her exalted spirit.

Does not the history of the past further warrant the expectation that the American mind would be a *practical* mind? Can you imagine any thing more practical than the subject in which the immigration of our fathers to this land originated? It was a question not only about doing, but about doing in a matter that concerned conscience and God. Their enterprise was indeed based upon certain great principles; and those principles had been evolved, as the result of mature and earnest thought; but they were so essentially practical that men could not embrace them without being active. The circumstances in which they found themselves on their arrival here, were such as to put *all* their faculties in requisition. There was a wilderness to be subdued; there were institutions to be established; there was a new form of society to be created and sustained; and in later periods, there were high questions of state to be settled,—bloody battles to be fought,—the fate of a nation to be decided; and here surely

was work for the hands as well as the head. The men who lived in times like these, whatever might have been their original predilections, must have been practical men at last; for it is no time to theorize, when great interests press, or great dangers environ. Accordingly, you will find that nearly all our great men in preceding generations have been, in the strict sense, working men. Instead of making their noble powers and acquisitions subservient to purposes of mere theoretical abstraction or intellectual indulgence, they have brought them as a free will offering to the well being of the country and the world. And why should this spirit have expired with the past? Why should not the mantle of the fathers have fallen upon the children?

It *has* thus fallen; and the evidence of it meets us every where. The practical element has entered into all our institutions; it breathes in our systems of education; it pervades the public sentiment; it is perceptible even in the most minute arrangements of society; it is looked for so much as a matter of course, that the mere philosophical dreamer, however ingenious, has

at best an inglorious reputation ; and when you meet such a person, you are ready to ask whether he is not a visitor from some other clime, or a relic of some other age. And this spirit has, especially in later years, partaken much of the impulsive and adventurous. Let the noble cities, where, half a century ago, were dense forests ;—let the blessings of civil and Christian society, where savage feats were lately performed and savage rites celebrated ;—let the rocks of Oregon, the mines of California, the shores of the Pacific, all witness that, whatever may be the faults that pertain to the American mind, she possesses at least an energy that never yields, a perseverance that never tires.

Quæ regio in terris nostri non plena laboris ?

I wish my conviction of what is due to truth and justice would allow me to pause here, and leave what I have already said as a complete portrait of the American mind. But in taking another glance at our history, the question seems to arise, whether it does not reveal influences which, considering the well known tendencies of human nature, might be expected to generate

at least a moderate degree of self-complacency. Is there not that in the character of our ancestry and the work which they accomplished, in the liberal type of our institutions, in the rapid growth of our population, in the high distinction to which we have already risen among the nations,—aye, and even in the vastness of our territory and the grandeur of our scenery,—on which our eye may justly repose with satisfaction; and would it be any anomalous development of human nature, if we should sometimes take a view of the condition of other nations, and then look at our own in the lustre of an advantageous, not to say, an offensive, comparison? Especially might not this be expected in view of our being a young nation, and as such liable to youthful indiscretions, as well as blessed with youthful vigour?

In answering these questions, I am obliged to confess to a national infirmity, which I fear you may think is but too well illustrated in the general tone of my remarks. But honesty constrains me to say that whoever should undertake to determine our measure of good feeling towards

ourselves, from either our past history or present advantages, would probably find what he might think a very liberal estimate exceeded by the actual reality. The truth is, (and it would be folly to attempt to dissemble it) our organ of national self-esteem has had no stinted development. We do like to walk in the light of the fire that our own hands have kindled; we love to have the air that we breathe perfumed with our own praise. We not only luxuriate among our free institutions, not only make an idol of the genius of republicanism, but we light down with signal complacency on those beautiful prairies of the far West, which we are sure were modelled after the garden of Eden. We go abroad and talk confidently and loftily, as if we had left the whole world at home. In short, my friends, I fear that we have a little too much self-respect, to receive our full measure of respect from other nations. And so marked is this peculiarity, that other nations never tire in making it the theme of delightful comment. It is not many months since I was present at the delivery of a popular lecture by a most respectable for-

eigner, who, in the course of his remarks, made a significant pause, and gathering himself into a sort of oracular attitude, and giving forth a look that seemed to discriminate every man, woman and child before him, said, without the least circumlocution,—“You are a *vain* people.” And what sort of a response, do you suppose, his audience gave him? Why, as if to meet the charge by an exhibition of that cardinal virtue that endureth all things, they actually greeted him with a storm of applause.

Hitherto we have considered the American mind as the child of the past,—as the legitimate product of influences that reach back to a far distant period. We are now to consider her as the parent of the future; in other words, to endeavour to predict the destiny which Heaven has ordained for her. Thus far we have stood on the high ground of history and observation; or if we have attempted to establish an antecedent probability, it has been where the fact answering to our reasonings had already occurred. Now we must pause a little in the region of conjecture; we must venture on a prophet's work,

without the aid of a prophet's inspiration; nevertheless, if we give due heed to the utterances of Providence, we shall be in little danger of being seriously misled.

Come then and let us see whether the blending of such qualities as constitute the mind of our nation, does not foreshadow at least a hopeful future. Is there nothing significant of good in her high measure of intelligence? Does not experience teach us that great achievements, except so far as they may depend on brute force, are never to be looked for from an uncultivated mind; while, on the other hand, a mind carefully trained and richly furnished is capable of devising noble projects for the benefit of the world? But it is easy to imagine intelligence existing apart from virtue; and then, though its devices might still be ingenious, they might also be both malignant and disastrous. Happily, however, in the case we are contemplating, we trust in Heaven that there is moral principle enough, light and vigour of conscience enough, to secure to the intellect of the nation a safe and useful direction. It is further conceivable that

the intellectual and the moral might unite in aid of the melioration of society, and yet, from not being combined with the practical, the plans which they originate, might never assume any higher form than well contrived and well intended theories. But the practical character of our nation is a sufficient guarantee that great and good thoughts will work their way into substantial experiences and lofty deeds. There need not be apprehended any fainting in view of difficulties and dangers; for there is an earnest and resolute spirit here, to which nothing looks formidable. Nor is there any thing to cramp the faculties, or repress the highest aspirations; for the mind acts with a freedom that knows no limit. Lay together then these several characteristics, and let each exert its modifying influence upon the rest, and when you have made all due allowance for our self-conceit and other national infirmities, you will find it difficult to resist the conviction that such a mind must work a bright path for itself through the coming ages. You may indeed gather from this view little that is definite in regard to remote results; but you

will at least be satisfied, from the cause you find in operation, that great effects of some kind must be produced.

It will aid us still further to a just conclusion in respect to the destiny of the American mind, to call to remembrance her past achievements, and then apply the argument from analogy. In respect to character, she had an auspicious beginning; in respect to circumstances, an exceedingly unpromising one; but there was that in the character that was destined to control the circumstances; there were bound up in it the elements of an enduring progress; and hence you cannot say that there has ever been even a pause in her career of improvement. She has met obstacles only to sweep them away as cobwebs. She has passed many a long night of adversity, but has never for a moment despaired of returning day. The arm that has attempted to invade her she has indignantly beaten back and withered. The forest and the inhabitants of the forest have fled before her alike, to make way for fruitful fields and an enlightened population. She has preached her favourite doctrine

of liberty,—an acknowledged innovation on all previous political systems,—even where tyrants have been the hearers; and there have been proselytes enough to the doctrine greatly to reduce the value of thrones. She has gone, as if on the wings of the morning, to the ends of the earth; and there is not a tribe buried so deep in the wilderness, or sunk so low in barbarism, but that it has been reached, in some way, by her influence. Especially has she lighted up the evangelical fires in various parts of the dark empire of Paganism, and is beckoning to the embrace of Christianity the outcasts and wanderers at the ends of the earth. She has been always labouring, and always seeing the fruit of her labours, as regularly as the sun moves through the heavens.

And is the past charged with no word of promise or of hope in respect to the future? Are we to suppose that the American mind has expended all her energies in the exploits of our fathers; that the stupendous machine which they constructed, and which has been operating so long with a constantly increasing power, is

suddenly to be arrested in its movements, or to sink gradually into irrecoverable disorder or decay? Allowing all that we must for ill boding stars, we can admit no such wild and despairing conclusion—on the contrary, we hear a voice from the past distinctly proclaiming, as if by divine authority, “Thou shalt see greater things than these;” and we expect that the prophecy will be fulfilled, as truly as that the order of providence shall proceed. What has not the American mind accomplished during the last century? And does any one dream that she will accomplish less in the century to come? What! Less with the innumerable facilities for prosecuting high enterprizes, which have come into existence in our day? Less, when the hitherto undiscovered powers of nature, as if averse to eternal repose, are coming forth on every side and offering themselves as handmaids in the cause of improvement? Less, under the influence of the accumulated wisdom and valour and faith of the three preceding generations, as embodied in their recorded testimony and the genius of their institutions? I do not

say what the American mind *will* do; but when I consider what she *has* done, I feel sure that she has only to hold on the even tenor of her way, to accomplish a marvellous work. With the advantages that she has brought with her from the past, and the additional advantages which she is constantly originating, and seems likely to originate, together with the natural increase of power incident to healthful progress, she must, unless she do some desperate suicidal act, be hailed through all future history, as at least one of the primary agents in the great work of intellectual, political and moral renovation.

But that which more than any thing else marks out an exalted destiny for the American mind, is the relation she bears to the cause of civil and religious freedom. She has not only put forth the true doctrine on this subject, but has illustrated it by her own bright example; and herein she has become a legitimate study for the world. Most of the nations are, to this hour, in a greater or less degree, in bondage; and till within a recent period, they have worn the chain as meekly as if they had regarded it an

essential element of their being. But in the conscious writhings and half suppressed murmurs of some of them at least, we discover now the signs of a waking humanity. They begin to realize that Heaven intended that they should be free; and their next step will be to resolve that no mortal power shall prevent it. Moreover, while they are adjusting their own accounts with Despotism, they will find that the dead of many generations are sending up a fearful catalogue of injuries that have never been atoned for, and are constituting them their agents in the work of retribution. And as visions of freedom rise before their minds, and as purposes of freedom gain a lodgment in their hearts, whither shall they look for model institutions, if not to ourselves? France long ago took a lesson from us, which, for a while indeed she perverted to purposes of anarchy, but which was really the seed of all the rational liberty she has ever enjoyed. Poland and Hungary,—unfortunate, but yet noble,—still bleeding under the oppressor's rod, and bleeding the more for their efforts to be free,—the flame that was kindled in them,—now

smothered, not extinguished,—no doubt may be traced to a spark that flew from this side the ocean. Prussia, though still clinging with tenacious grasp to the ancient regime, has yet shown herself ready, in the person of her Sovereign, to give deferential heed to some of the maxims of American policy. Italy, glorious once but degraded now, is beginning to lift her trembling and withered hands, to show that the breath of a new life is entering into her; and her spirit, in its very first throbbings, turns for sympathy and guidance to this favoured land. Russia and Austria and Portugal, with scarcely sensibility enough to know that they have bleeding wounds, and scarcely light enough to recognize Freedom, if her angel form were to pass before them, give some faint prognostic of what the American mind is yet to do for them, even in the horrid scowl which their kings and nobles take on, at the very mention of our republican system. Aye, and venerable Old England,—that Jerusalem who is the mother of us all,—who should have cherished us when she oppressed us,—much as she watches for our halting, lifts up a thousand

voices to testify to the benign influence of our institutions. Only let these institutions remain in unimpaired efficiency, and I do not think it too much to say that, sooner or later, they will drive every despot out of the world.

Let me add that the American mind, in assisting to liberalize the policy of other nations, is bringing new helps to her own peculiar mission. She has a right to expect that each recovered nation, while it bears an honourable testimony in favour of freedom, will come up an active and welcome coadjutor to advance its triumphs. The modern republics that have here and there sprung up, have indeed but very imperfectly realized her conception of liberal institutions. She trusts, however, that, in the progress of knowledge and virtue,—those essential requisites to self-government, they will become at once more stable and more efficient; will not only sustain themselves in their legitimate independence, but will contribute somewhat to the political weal of the world. But she finds her most substantial helper in the spirit of the age,—an invisible and mighty agent that has been moulded and trained, in no

small degree, by her own instrumentality. It were quite too narrow a view of the case to imagine that she is prosecuting her great work unassisted and alone, because she has entered into no visible alliances for the dissemination of her principles, or because she is in advance of all other nations on the subject of liberty. Let it be remembered that the spirit of Freedom, which is emphatically the spirit of the age, is, in some measure, independent of external organizations. She forces herself into many a bosom that would fain disown her. She lives in the pulsations of many a heart that dares not reveal its own experiences. She restrains the workings of arbitrary power, by marking authoritatively the limit which it may not pass. And even where her utterances are most faint or least regarded, she expects ere long to maintain an undisputed sway. Under the auspices of such a patron as this the American mind is doing her work; and if she works at a great advantage even now, what shall be said of her when the spirit of the age has grown ten fold more irresistible, and new republics are starting up all over

the world, and combining with her in the common cause of rational and enduring freedom.

Review now the ground we have passed over, and see whether any thing is wanting to justify the highest expectations concerning the mind of our country. From what she is in her youth, judge what she is likely to be in her maturity. From what she has done already, judge what will be the probable standard and measure of her achievements in ages to come. Consider the relation she sustains to the pending conflict between the spirit of arbitrary rule and the spirit of free institutions, and say what nobler field was ever open to human effort, and what higher advantages could be enjoyed for successfully occupying it. And finally, call to mind the enlarged resources that she will reveal, the multiplied auxiliaries that she will command, in the lapse of years and centuries, and tell me who will fix the point where the eternal barrier shall rise to mark the last step in her onward course. We know on infallible authority that the reign of truth and liberty and love is ere long to become universal; and unless we sadly misinter-

pret the aspects of providence, we must conclude that the American mind is to have an agency in its establishment, that will leave no question to be settled in regard to the greatness of her destiny.

I think I hear it murmured by some incredulous spirit that, with all my reverence for the teachings of the past, I am overlooking at least one of her most palpable and monitory lessons—Where are the republics of other days? Where especially is Greece, that once threw all the rest of the world's civilization into dire eclipse? And Rome, that was, for ages, the acknowledged seat of power, the great nursery of human intellect? Why sleeping side by side in the common cemetery of nations; and so long since departed, that we have to turn far back in the world's history to find the record of their achievements. Why then may not our nation follow along down through the same dark valley, and thus belie all our predictions concerning her destiny? I will tell you why—and I must throw into a sentence what might well admit of being expanded to a volume—it is because the intelligence of those nations centered in a few, while the mass of our

countrymen are enlightened; it is, more especially, because we are blessed with a religion which came down from Heaven, and which points back to Heaven, whereas they were under the influence of Paganism,—a poor educator of both the heart and the conscience; and when some of their greater minds became tired of its absurdities, and felt secretly constrained to cast it off, there was no other system on which they could fall back; for the principles of a pure theism were hardly to be reached amidst so much darkness. Here then I find a reason why I may stand beside the graves of other republics, and yet prophesy of the perpetuity of our own—I remember that we are a Christian nation; and as Christianity reveals immortality to man in his individual being, so I cannot doubt that a pure, free, healthful Christianity will act as a life-preserving principle to every institution that is moulded and guided by her influence. Had Tacitus lived in our day, he might at least have paused before writing such a sentence as the following—*Reipublicæ forma laudari facilius quam evenire, et si evenit, haud diuturna esse potest.*

But I hear you say again, Have you no eye for passing events? See you not the dark clouds that reach from mid-heaven down to the horizon; not only shutting out the sun, but leaving only here and there enough of the blue sky to witness to the native glory of that part of creation? I answer, Yes, I see it all; and I do not take it upon myself to say what it may portend. There may be a tempest gathering there that will make the foundations of our republic rock, and bring faintness to the heart that has never yet taken its first lesson in fear. But no matter how wild and terrible it may be, I expect that my country will survive it in triumph. I expect that those who walk over my grave, will breathe a purer atmosphere, and move with a more elastic step, because of the fire that shall have fallen from Heaven to burn up whatever rubbish may have accumulated upon our institutions. And if you ask me for the ground of this expectation, my answer is,—I do not believe, I cannot believe, that it would consist with the designs of infinite wisdom, that the world should now perform a retrograde course of centuries. I have confidence

in the Ruler of nations that He will blow upon every project that is formed to destroy our liberty, that He will chain every hand that dares to lift itself against it; especially that He will cast out from among ourselves the spirit of reckless insubordination, while yet He imparts to us a still larger measure of the spirit of enlightened freedom. I can imagine but one event in which I should recognize the utter prostration of American hopes, the virtual extinction of the American mind; and that is, (though the phrase ought never to have been admitted into our national vocabulary,) THE RENDING OF THIS UNION. Far be it from me to adventure a step on party ground, or to touch a chord that should not vibrate in full unison with the joyous harmonies of this hour. But it surely is not incongruous with the occasion to say that the hand that should deal so direful a blow, would stand charged, before the tribunals of earth and Heaven, with a deed of high treason, not only against the country, but against the race. And if the night of by-gone ages should return upon the world, never would the slumber become so profound or universal,

but that voices of execration would be lifted up against the man or the body of men, who, in breaking down American institutions, and thus stopping the march of the American mind, had extinguished Freedom's last hope, and helped Tyranny back into her throne.

I am quite aware that the course of thought into which I have fallen, has been less conformed to the letter of the occasion, than might have been suggested by some more distinctly marked literary topic. But if I have erred, I have erred advisedly, and with an honest aim to turn the hour to the best account that I could. I meet you indeed as the friends and patrons of Literature; but Literature herself holds scarcely a separate, much less an independent, domain. She is a tributary to the great cause of human welfare; she is the sister of Freedom and Religion; indeed she belongs to a company of bright angels, that are forever hovering about on errands of good will. I meet you then in the yet higher character of educated members of a great republic, on whom it devolves to secure to the American mind such development, and give

to her powers such direction, as shall best fulfil what seems to be her allotted destiny. Richly does Literature deserve our reverential regards; and gratefully will we recognize her claims by laying some of our best offerings at her feet. But let her not forget that she has other work to do than to linger luxuriously in the groves of the Academy; that she has fallen upon a stirring age, and as she would perform the part that Providence has assigned to her, must sympathize with the movements of the great world. Recollect, Gentlemen, that every effort you put forth in aid of sound learning, is an effort in aid of the utility and permanence of the institutions in which you glory. Recollect too that, as these institutions develope, in their progress to maturity, constantly higher powers, they repay to Learning, with liberal interest, all that they have received from her. Surely then you will not find it difficult to pardon me for having been led to merge, in some degree, the less in the greater; to look at the ultimate triumph to which Learning is to be an auxiliary, rather than to exhibit her individual attractions, or *follow her in the details of her history.*

I began by adverting to some of the grateful associations that cluster about this venerated spot—allow me to close by referring to certain others, less public indeed, but not less sacred, which belong perhaps equally to the place and to the occasion. As I have not the honour to be one of your alumni, and never but once before had the privilege of being present at your anniversary celebration, it were not to be expected that my personal associations with the day should be either familiar or extensive. I have, however, one cherished recollection awakened by its return, to which I feel the more free to allude, as it has respect to an individual, once one of your own number, of whose praise none who knew him at least, will ever grow weary.

My first knowledge of the existence of this society, was from reading an address delivered before it forty-two years ago;—an address rich in classical erudition, and sparkling with gems of eloquence. Well do I recollect how it inspirited my youthful mind, as I returned to it, again and again, with almost boundless admiration. Before I had yet passed my boyhood,

(thanks to a venerable friend who is still living*) I was brought in contact with the author of that address, and was privileged, for some little time, to be within the range of his smiles and kind offices. I remember most vividly his genial, gentle and loving spirit. I remember his countenance,—now seeming to say, by the impress of weariness and exhaustion, that his mind needed a frame of stronger texture, and now brightening up into an unearthly lustre, as if it were the favourite gathering place of the graces. I remember his fine powers of conversation,—how intelligent and communicative, and yet how simple and modest. I remember how composed and reverent and brilliant he appeared in the pulpit, and how I felt the charm of his voice as if it had come up from the bosom of a seraph. I remember too how quickly after this, a fearful malady which had long been preying upon him, took him out of your ranks, and how the tidings of his death were responded to by thousands in expressions of heartfelt sorrow. And now, after the lapse of nearly forty years, his laurels are

* Rev. Abiel Abbot, D. D., of Peterborough, N. H.

budding as fresh as ever; his few surviving friends and associates still call up his image with undiminished reverence and tenderness; while many of the later generation witness, by their eager inquiries, how gladly they would have seen and heard him for themselves. Tell me not, especially here on ground sacred to literature, where we are met in goodly fellowship and in honour of a common cause,—tell me not that he was of a different school of Theology from myself, and therefore I may not honour him as an early friend and a noble specimen of the divine workmanship. I say frankly, I could not consent to heed a suggestion so narrow. I would not even seem to admit that I may not cherish with due regard my own religious convictions, and yet keep my eye open to intellectual and moral beauty, regardless of all casual associations. Tell me not that benedictions have already been so profusely showered upon his memory, that even gratitude may well afford now to spare her offerings; for the measuring out of due honour to such a spirit is not a matter for rigid calculation—it is a subject in relation

to which it scarcely belongs to the intellect to dictate to the heart; and if it is fitting that his genius and worth should still be commemorated any where, doubtless it is here,—within the bowers where he used to repose, and almost within sight of his grave. I have no fear then that you will think it unsuitable to the occasion or to any relations I sustain to it, that I should connect with it a passing tribute to so endeared and classic a name as BUCKMINSTER. Nor will it seem to you an invidious distinction that I should point to only a single star; as I could hardly go farther, taking my observations from this spot, without traversing an entire galaxy. For the sake of learning and virtue, for the sake of our common country and our common humanity, cherish the memories of the illustrious dead; and may their mantles rest gracefully upon you—

Dulcis amor patriæ, dulce videre suos.

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